

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2998

As Passed House:
February 9, 2006

Title: An act relating to the high school assessment system.

Brief Description: Requiring a study to explore options to augment the current educational assessment system.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives P. Sullivan, Simpson, Santos, McCoy, Chase, Morrell, B. Sullivan, Hasegawa, Kenney and Green).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/23/06, 2/1/06 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/9/06, 80-18.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Requires the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to study options to augment the current system of assessments to demonstrate students have met the state learning standards.
- Limits the study to a statistical analysis of students not successful on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning; review and identification of additional alternative assessment options; and review and identification of additional methods, procedures, or performance measures to determine students have met the standards.
- Requires an interim report by December 1, 2006, and a final report by December 1, 2007.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Priest, Santos, Shabro, Tom and Wallace.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member and Curtis.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, most students will be required to obtain a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA) in order to graduate from a public high school in the state. Students must meet the state standards in reading, writing, and mathematics on the high school Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to earn a CAA. Science will be added in 2010. Starting in 2006, students will have four opportunities to retake the WASL in the content areas where they did not meet the state standard.

In 2004, the Legislature also authorized the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to develop one or more objective alternative assessments for high school students to demonstrate they meet the state academic standards instead of relying on the WASL for this purpose. To use an alternative, a student must take the WASL at least twice. The Legislature must formally approve implementation of any alternative assessment.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) must conduct a study to explore options to augment the current system of assessments and provide additional opportunities for students to demonstrate they have met state learning standards.

The study is limited to the following items:

- (1) A statistical analysis of the characteristics of students not successful on the WASL and identification of possible barriers or causes of the lack of success.
- (2) Review of additional alternative assessment options to augment the current assessment system, including a review of alternative assessments used in other states and those used or proposed in Washington and a review of national tests and career skill certification exams. The review includes examination of costs for implementation, cultural appropriateness, reliability, equality in rigor to the WASL, and challenges to implementation.
- (3) Review and identification of additional methods, procedures, or performance measures to assess whether students have met the learning standards. In addition to examining the topics listed above, this review examines whether the procedures can be standardized across the state.

An interim report is due December 1, 2006, that includes preliminary statistics and recommendations on at least two options. The final report is due December 1, 2007, and includes suggestions for additional studies.

The Institute must consult with nationally recognized assessment experts including representatives from national centers for multicultural education, the SPI, educators, parents, the business community, and representatives of federally recognized Washington tribes, linguistic and racial minority groups, and the community of persons with disabilities. The SPI and school districts must provide access to necessary data to conduct the studies.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 2, 2006.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support of original bill) The WASL is an important tool, but students should have opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in other ways that are equally rigorous. When education reform started, it was intended to measure schools. Now we are measuring students. The learning standards are Fort Knox; no one is going to change them. The WASL also deserves to stay, but we must provide alternatives. One shoe and one test do not fit all. Choice is critical alongside high standards. Other states have recognized the need to prepare multiple measures.

(With concerns on original bill) An alternative system where all elements are treated equally should be supported. The conceptual framework underlying the WASL is fundamentally flawed.

Testimony Against: (Original bill) Students are the source of our future workforce and economy. The WASL and the CAA represent a fair standard. There should be alternatives for students who have proven their inability to perform on the WASL, but we should not be lowering our standards.

Persons Testifying: (In support of original bill) Representative Pat Sullivan, prime sponsor; Booth Gardner, Former Washington Governor; Suzi Wright, Tulalip Tribes; Mary Edgerton, Juanita Doyon, and Rachel DeBellis, Parent Empowerment Network; Maryelle DeBellis; Doreen Cato, Washington State Emergency Operations Center; Kathleen Lopp, Washington Association for Career and Technical Education; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition; and Linda Laville.

(With concerns on original bill) Gary King, Washington Education Association; and Alton McDonald, National Action Network.

(Opposed to original bill) Mellani McAleenan, Association of Washington Business; and Nancy Atwood, American Electronics Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: George Scarola, League of Education Voters; Dan Steele, Washington State School Directors Association; Mery dee Carlson.